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8 May 2003

RUS41560.E

Russia: Treatment of Hare Krishna adherents
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada introduced the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) (Hare Krishna) in Russia in 1971 (*The Moscow Times* 17 Apr. 2003). First registered as a religion in 1988 (Krylova 17-19 April 1998; AP 28 Aug. 1999), ISKCON was officially re-registered on 23 October 1998 under the purview of the 1997 law on religion (*Providence Journal-Bulletin* 7 Nov. 1998).

There were 120 Krishna communities in Russia in 1998 (*ibid.*; *The Moscow Times* 23 Sept. 1998); however, the 2001 Russian Ministry of Justice records indicate 106 officially registered Krishna groups (RFE/RL 19 Apr. 2001; KSN 2 Apr. 2001). The ISKCON website lists the addresses of 39 Krishna centers in Russia (n.d.). Reportedly, 100,000 Krishna adherents worship in more than 20 Russian cities (*Moscow Times* 15 Nov. 2002; *ibid.* 17 Apr. 2003). One Muscovite temple claims 10,000 members and Moscow hosts an accredited school called the Bhaktivedanta Gurukula, which has been educating pre-school to grade 11 students for 12 years (*ibid.*). Additionally, a 1999 report refers to an unregistered Hare Krishna splinter organization called the Institute of Knowledge on Identity based in Primorye in Russia's far east with 200 members (AP 16 July 1999). No further information on the latter group was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The *Providence Journal-Bulletin* stated in 1998 that "[u]ntil the early 1980s, Russian Krishnas were persecuted by the government" (7 Nov. 1998). Although identified as a "dangerous" religious influence by the Moscow Russian Orthodox Patriarchate in 2001, ISKCON "for the most part" functions freely (KNS 19 Aug. 2002). *The Moscow Times* also indicated past harassment, but referred to the current situation as "a new era of freedom" (17 Apr. 2003). According to Bhakti Vijnana Goswami (Vadim Tunayev), the head of the Russian chapter of ISKCON, there have not been any particular recent problems in Russia, "especially from the government" and adherent's situation has been "one more or less of acceptance" (*The Moscow Times* 15 Nov. 2002). The most recent attack on members of the Krishna community found by the Research Directorate occurred in 1999 when a group of youths entered a Muscovite temple and assaulted members (AP 28 Aug. 1999).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). 19 April 2001. Paul Goble. "Russia" Analysis from Washington - A Religious Flowering." <<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2001/04/1904200110919.asp>> [Accessed 6 May 2003]

Additional Sources Consulted

NEXIS

Internet sites, including:

Adherents.com

Amnesty International

Center for Studies on New Religions

Godhead

Hare Krishna World

Human Rights Watch

ISKCON Communications Journal

ISKCON Russia

Krishna.ru

Religious News (Stetson.edu)

World News Connection

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